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ABSTRACT

Designed to provide a more positive learning experience in the area of third grade social studies, this project was concerned with improving the effectiveness of textbooks, developing critical thinking skills, providing group learning situations, and using the computer as an educational tool. Chapter 1 contains the outline of the research proposal and the methodology, while chapter 2 reviews the literature associated with how children learn social studies. The final chapter, chapter 3, contains three social studies units (a combination map skills/Chicago unit, a small group teaching unit, and a unit on the parts of a metropolitan community) used to test new teaching methods that incorporate more classroom discussion, participation, and group work. After each unit, an evaluative survey was given to the students and the surveys with responses are included. The appendix contains treasure hunt materials designed for use with the map unit, and a 24-item reference list. (DJC)

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SOCIAL STUDIES: EXPERIENCES IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

SO 019 396

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CHAPTER ONE
THE PROPOSAL

CHAPTER ONE PROPOSAL

It is the last period of the day. Reading work has just been completed and turned in while some is put in lockers to go home. The students look tired and ready to call it a day. However, there is one last subject to be covered. The children look at me with anticipation. I know what they are thinking. "Maybe, just maybe, she won't say it." Oh how I dread to say the words yet, I must. "Okay children, take out your social studies books."

Faces drop, bodies slowly move and all types of moans, groans, and complaints are unfortunately heard. Another boring lesson of social studies and not only boring for the students but the teacher as well.

FOCUS

The focus of this project was to provide a more positive learning experience in the area of social studies. It concentrated on incorporating various methods for teaching social studies in the third grade classroom in order to improve academic achievement. This project was concerned with improving the effectiveness of the social studies text, improving critical thinking skills through problem solving and questioning techniques, providing group learning situations and using the computer as an educational tool within the social studies.

RATIONALE OF THE FOCUS

Social Studies is a complex area that involves many aspects. It is an area in which I believed my students had the most difficulties. Teaching in a northwest suburban community, with a group of predominantly middle to upper class students, played a major role in implementing the social studies curriculum.

The major goals of the curriculum were to guide the children into becoming individuals with a positive self-concept while also enabling them to acquire a knowledge and appreciation for the global and metropolitan society in which they live. Other goals included problem solving and social and valuing skills that provided a basis for decision making.

The major drawback within the social studies curriculum in Aptakisic Tripp District 102 was the text. It was extremely informative and sufficient in meeting the goals of the curriculum however, the concepts were presented at a high degree of difficulty.

Therefore, I wanted to explore various teaching methods in order to supplement the text. I wanted to find exciting alternatives and eliminate the "moans and groans" associated with the words, "Okay, children, take out your social studies books."

The project's main goals were to help students gain a better understanding of textbook vocabulary, organization and content, develop critical thinking skills in children through activities

different from textbook reading, drilling, and testing. Use problem solving and appropriate questioning techniques to develop critical thinking skills. Use computers as aides in teaching social studies. And finally, allow social studies to be a more positive learning experience. Enable students to learn while feeling less inhibited in order for them to develop their own positive self-image.

A prime source material for the social studies is the textbook. It is often the basis or guide for the organization of instruction in the classroom. Social studies textbook series will provide teachers with a framework, a logical sequential program that is planned with each activity building on the foundation provided by the previous activity. However, relating specific concepts can be bothersome. Teachers often have difficulty arranging an effective sequence of activities for programs based on concepts within the text. Therefore, the programs and procedures need to be utilized in order to achieve the best results.

The information should be organized in such a way that children can easily find it. Also, the information should be clearly stated in order to ease understanding and broaden their outlooks. Sufficient information should be presented to avoid difficulties in understanding and irrelevant details should not obscure the facts needed. Therefore, the social studies text needs to be looked at as one tool that can be used in order to improve academic achievement. The important concepts should be taught along with supplementary activities in order to enhance and provide motivation for learning.

The development of critical thinking skills is a main goal of

education. Problem solving and questioning technique are two areas important to this development.

According to John Jarolimek (1982), the major goal of inquiry-oriented teaching is to develop in pupils the attitudes and skills that enable them to be independent problem solvers. This means that students need to develop a healthy skepticism about things and events in the world. Good problem solvers have a curiosity about what they see going on around them. They develop a questioning attitude.

This element of inquiry can cause some people to have reservations about its use with young children. Parents, for example, may prefer to have their children accept certain beliefs and ideas to be truths that should not be questioned. Because of these conflicts, it is important to remember that inquiry, based on problem solving procedures, is only one of several ways of knowing things to be true.

Group processes in the classroom continue to be of primary concern for many educators. Due to the increasing complexity of social conditions and the large concentrations of people, there is a definate need for learning in order to work effectively in groups. We cannot merely avoid social problems, but rather must learn how to handle them constructively if we are to live and work well together.

Classroom experiences may influence how the students will behave in a given situation. Each member of the classroom brings to it a special, unique set of characteristics which set the stage for group processes. Each wants to feel included and influential, and each wants respect and a feeling of personal importance. An emotionally supportive

atmosphere is one that is characterized by trust and by evidence that individuals care about each other.

Computer education is rapidly growing in today's society. There is a growing use of computers in education as well. The challenge for teachers is to integrate the computer into the ongoing instructional program.

The computer can be useful in order to practice and apply social studies skills. The computer is a form of instructional media that allows the student to interact with it. It does not simply present the material to be learned, but actively involves the student in the process. This also allows for individualized pacing and learning. The main concern, again, is how and when to incorporate the computer into the existing curriculum.

The main goals of this project were to research these areas of textbook instruction, critical thinking skills, group processes and computer education in order to learn how to incorporate better methods of teaching social studies. I achieved my goals through experiences both positive and negative. I learned what works and what does not and I became a better teacher because of it!

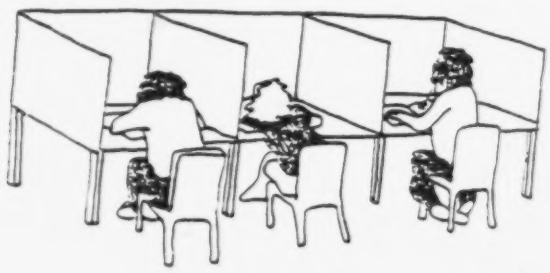
RESEARCH METHODS

The research for this project was collected through the following research methods; journal readings, books observations, interviews, questionnaires and additudinal inventories, student logs, and test scores.

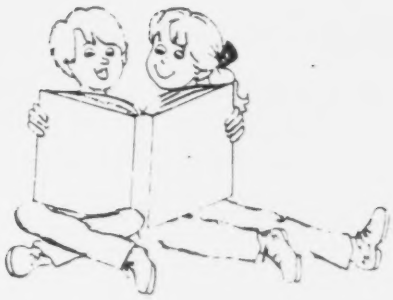
Notes were taken from journal readings and books. The most helpful sources available that gave me the information in which I was researching were social studies methods texts. The E.R.I.C. search was also helpful in my quest for information.

When I began implementing various social studies methods within the classroom, I collected my data through observation. This allowed me to see what was happening while I was in the process of teaching. I recorded what was happening during each lesson and remained as objective as possible.

In order to find out whether learning had occured, the students were the most important resource. Through interviews, questionnaires, additudinal inventories, and student logs, I gained insight into what methods promoted better understanding of the social studies.



READING PLAN



The reading plan for this project incorporated the following topics in order to improve academic achievement in the social studies.

(Social Studies Text)

I searched for information that dealt with vocabulary, organization, and content within the social studies text. I wanted to explore methods of teaching that would help clarify social studies text.

(Critical Thinking Skills)

I searched for information in the areas of problem solving and various questioning techniques in order to improve critical thinking skills.

(Group Processes)

I looked at group processes and their benefits within the social studies curriculum. Cooperative and student-centered learning along with game activities were researched.

(Computer)

Computer research was also included. I concentrated on simulation activities and the necessity of computer education in today's classroom.

Questions that I needed to consider as I was reading are as follows:

Social Studies Text

What information was important?

What vocabulary needed to be reinforced?

What context needed to be clarified?

Critical Thinking Skills

What problems could be found that were relevant to the topic being presented?

What questions would be applicable to the content being presented?

Group Processes

What skills needed to be taught in order to insure cooperative group learning?

What would be the role of the group?

What would be the role of the individual?

How would I promote student-centered learning?

Computer

How would I incorporate the computer within the given curriculum?

What simulation games or software would coincide with the curriculum?

TIMELINE

October-December '86	Read research handbook. In class discussed projects. Came to a decision about topic.
January '87	Began collecting data for outline and topic question.
February '87	Outline was due in completed form.
February-March '87	Collected data for rough draft of proposal. Rough draft completed.
March-April '87	Revised rough draft of proposal.
April '87	Final proposal was due.
April-September '87	Continued to research and collect data for project.
September-December '87	Implemented various methods within the social studies curriculum. Continued to research and collect data.
February '88	Wrote chapter two.

March-April '88

Pulled information together and completed chapter three.

May '88

Rewrote chapter one.
Completed project.

CHAPTER TWO
THE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

From time to time, various researchers have tried to identify how children feel about the subjects they study. Unfortunately their results often differ. However, social studies tends to rank as one subject students like the least.

Why do children rank social studies as low as they do? Is there something wrong with the subject matter? with the way it is taught? or why it is taught? One cause for this low ranking can be attributed to a mismatch between the nature of the subject and the way in which it is traditionally taught.

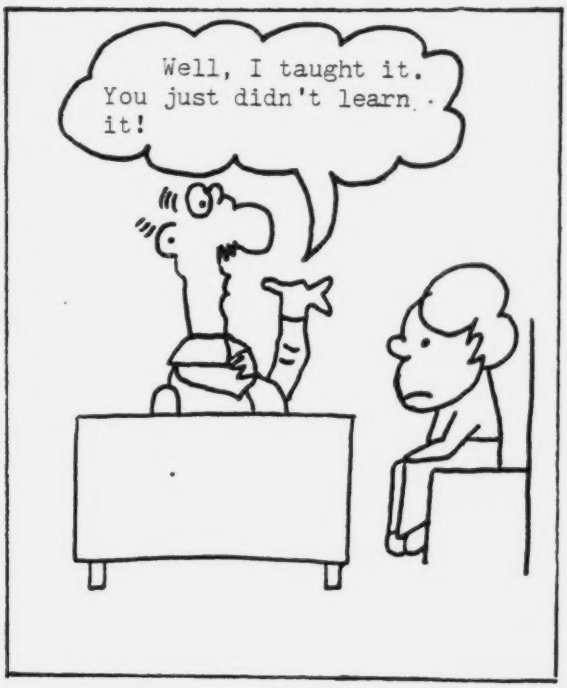
There is no intrinsically logical structure as in mathematics. (i.e Addition, subtraction, and multiplication are taught before division.) Also, unlike mathematics where there is a right or wrong answer, in social studies it is never quite sure. Perhaps children can better understand by dealing with the real and living rather than the far removed places and people long dead. They may also prefer reading interesting stories rather than a social studies book that often resembles a miniature encyclopedia.

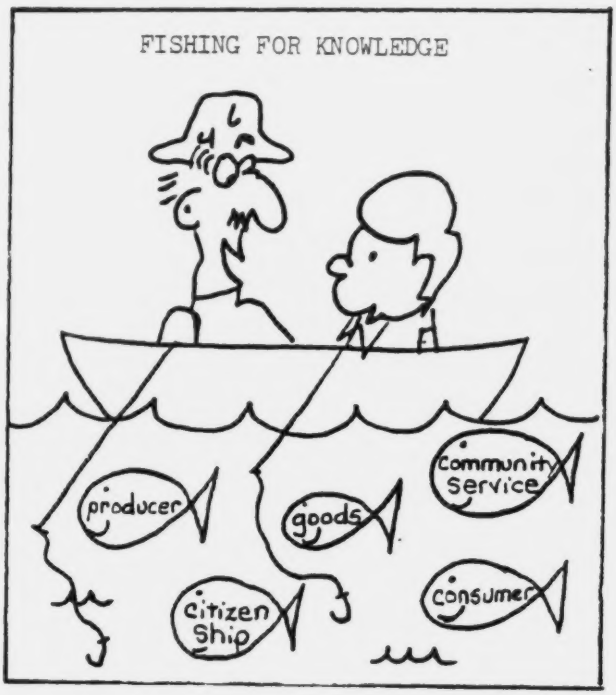
Social studies was traditionally designated and taught as separate subjects. Educators are coming to realize that there are a variety of formats that the social studies programs can take. Ponder the possibility.---Can social studies be taught much the same way arithmetic

is taught---as something children do rather than as something they are supposed to know? Such an approach is likely to be different from the way in which most of us learned social studies. Teaching the use of social studies.

Give a man a fish
and you feed him for one day.
Teach him to fish (and)
he feeds himself for a lifetime.

Social studies as teaching children "to fish"? Consider it!





For the past two years I have been teaching third grade social studies. The district has a designated textbook series and that is the basis for what should be taught. The textbook is comprehensive with concepts ranging from community to government. The district also has a written curriculum of what is to be taught and the time frame in which it is to be taught. Of course these curricular objectives meet with the state social studies objectives. Since this district, not unlike any other, is so concerned with students' academic performance, these objectives are supposedly measured through standardized tests. This means, as teachers, we are told that we should cover as much material as possible in order to achieve higher test scores in our students.

Therefore, my social studies class time has been spent doing the following:

1. Children take out their books.
2. Student or teacher reads. (Most often the teacher reads because the words are too difficult for the students.)
3. Students and teacher discuss the concepts to be learned.
4. Review time is spent before a test is given. Major concepts and vocabulary are discussed and written on study guide.

5. Test is given. (Often they are teacher made tests due to the difficulty of basal tests.)

6. Tests are evaluated. (Usually on a curve. Because of the limited time, most do not learn all the concepts presented in a chapter.)

7. Immediately begin the next chapter.

This year I said, "ENOUGH!" I despise teaching social studies in this manner. I want to find alternative methods in order to make the classroom experience more pleasureable and rewarding for both the students and myself. That is where my research has taken me. What else is out there that can be used in my classroom that can take the boring, rote learning out of social studies? This is what I have found.

It helps dramatically if the social studies program is built on what the child already knows. Children learn a great deal about social studies in their life experiences outside of school through travel, television, and contact with adults. They learn values and skills from their families and from contact from other persons through social experiences. Consequently, hardly anything to be encountered by the child will be totally new.

For teachers this means that in introducing topics or units for study, we need to explore with the children the extent of their prior

experiences with the subject. Teachers often begin a study by focusing on aspects of a topic that are familiar to the children, such as their own homes, schools, and families. Then the study can be expanded to include these same institutions in other cultures. (Jarolimek, 1982) This movement from things that are close to those that are far away and back again is common in social studies programs today.

Social studies programs should then be planned to build learning sequentially, year by year. Each year there will be study units and topics that are consistent with the emphasis suggested by the district curriculum for that year. The content and sequence of social studies programs vary from place to place. However, according to John Jarolimek, some common elements can be found in most elementary school social studies programs.

1. Almost everywhere, some attention is given to the home state.

2. Social studies deals with the growth and development of the United States.

3. Exposure to the world beyond the immediate environment comes early in most programs and continues throughout the grades.

4. Most programs incorporate aspects of current affairs, holiday observances, and local issues.

5. Many schools include topics of contemporary interest in their curriculum such as law-related education; the world of work; environmental education; drugs and dangerous substances; energy; or economic education.

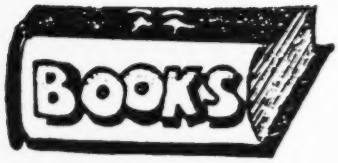
6. Most programs reflect an awareness of racism, sexism, and racial and sex-role stereotyping.

7. Greater numbers of schools are allowing and encouraging teachers to explore alternatives and options to the regular program.

Several national surveys have been conducted in recent years to find out what is being taught in the social studies curriculum at the various grade levels. The results of these surveys are summarized in an article in the May 1980 issue of Social Education. The dominant themes, according to this article, in the social studies curriculum are these:

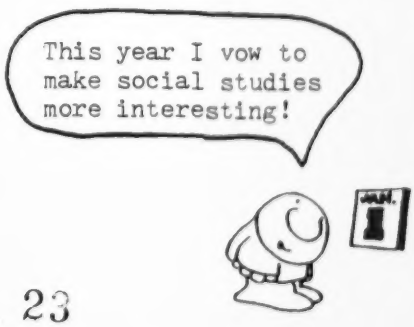
K Self; School; Community; Home
1 Families
2 Neighborhoods
3 Communities
4 State History; Geographic Regions
5 U.S. History
6 World Cultures; Western Hemisphere
7 World Geography or History
8 American History
9 Civics or World Cultures
10 World History
11 American History
12 American Government

Regardless of what is being taught from district to district, the key element is involvement of the child. When past experiences of the child are utilized, learning can take on more meaning and substance. The subject of social studies is no longer foreign but something that involves the learner directly. What better motivation can there be than that of the experiences of the children themselves?



The main thing I have been looking for in my research is how better to deal with the textbook series I am required to use. Since reading is the most important and essential skill for learning, what happens to those children who are retarded in reading? Of course they will encounter more difficulties especially when reading a text that is written above their grade level. Some things can be learned visually or through careful listening, but these experiences cannot completely substitute for reading. In spite of the introduction of new materials and media that reduce the reading requirement for some students, the social studies program still depends heavily on reading as a means of learning.

Elementary schools provide time during the school day when a major effort is made to teach basic reading skills. However, a strong basic reading program will not be able to meet all the reading needs of children because each area of the school curriculum requires reading tasks that are somewhat unique to that special area. Therefore, social studies teachers need to help children develop the specific reading skills and abilities needed to handle social studies material intelligently. Through my research and various sources, (see bibliography), I have compiled a list of needed abilities that are typically found in most social studies programs.



In social studies, the capable reader

- uses chapter and section headings as aids to reading.
- uses context clues to gain meaning.
- recognizes author bias.
- adjusts speed of reading to purpose.
- interprets what is read.
- detects cause-and-effect relationships.
- understands essential terms and vocabulary.
- gains information from maps, pictures, and illustrations.
- uses various parts of a book as aids to reading.
- is able to skim to locate facts.
- distinguishes between fact and opinion.
- compares one account with another.
- recognizes topic sentences.
- interprets quantitative data accurately.
- obtains the literal meaning of the material read.
- relates what is read to reality.
- uses reference aids and references to find information.
- is able to locate a book in the library.

Reading in the social studies is an intellectual process and therefore requires the reader to think while engaging in it. Problems occur with a student's inability to conceptualize and to handle the ideas being presented through the symbolic system of print. Reading tasks can be simplified by careful attention to vocabulary and structural elements. Essentially, explanations need to be given to specialized subjects and topics. The reader will not understand the passage unless the meanings of the terms, words, and concepts used are understood.

It is obvious that the capable reader in social studies needs to learn many skills. This can be a problem for a lower-intermediate teacher that has been given a push for coverage by her supervisors. Preparation of lessons will also be extremely time consuming in order to teach all the necessary skills to make each reader in her class a "capable social studies reader." So can it be done? I decided it can be done, one step at a time.

The first step is to realize that we as teachers need to be sensitive to pupil differences in reading ability. Sure, many of us realize these differences while conducting reading instruction but we can sometimes tend to ignore those differences when it comes to social studies. I admit I have been guilty of conducting social studies instruction as if those variations in reading ability did not exist. The teacher needs to remember and understand the various abilities of individual pupils to apply word-attack skills and to comprehend what is read.

Unlike reading a library book simply for enjoyment, reading in social studies involves a search for information. Social studies materials provide many aids to the student in doing this type of reading. We as teachers cannot assume that the children know these skills. We must teach them. Even if that means teaching one or two skills at a time, chapter by chapter, grade level by grade level. The skills associated with the use of study aids must be taught, reviewed, and retaught each year throughout the elementary school grades.

Some examples of study aids and study skills to improve reading are as follows:

Using Various Parts of a Book

title page
copyright page
preface
table of contents
list of maps
list of illustrations
glossary
pronunciation key
appendix
index

The parts of a book should be taught as aids in getting information.

Using the Organization of a Book

units
chapters
section heads
subheads
ends of section, chapter
unit study aids
maps, charts, or picture captions
introductory questions

All of these make sense to the mature reader who uses them as valuable aids in understanding the organization of a book. But left unguided, a child is not likely to make good use of them as aids to reading.

We will have no social
studies class today.

Recognizing Topic Sentences

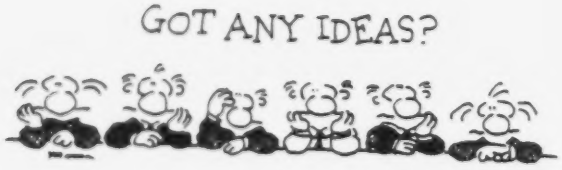
Students need to learn to recognize the main idea developed in a paragraph so that they can organize the ideas developed by the author in some order of importance. They need to learn to separate the topic being discussed from the supporting details. They learn that the topic sentence is the critical one in the paragraph because it tells the reader what the paragraph is about.

Using Picture Captions

Pictures and illustrations elaborate concepts presented in the narrative but usually do not repeat exactly what is said in the text. The full value of these exercises are not realized unless students are taught how to make good use of them.

Of course this is only the beginning to the list of skills that need to be taught in order to allow children to become capable readers in the area of social studies. As mentioned before, we as teachers need to select the skills appropriate to the needs of our students and build on these skills throughout the elementary years.

As I continued my research, I wanted to look for more ways in which I could allow social studies to be a positive learning experience. I wanted to look for alternatives and/or supplements in order to enhance learning.



The areas in which I concentrated are as follows:

1. Problem Solving
2. Questioning Technique
3. Group Learning
4. Computer Study

BRILLIANT IDEAS

A main goal of education is the development of thinking skills. Two areas in which thinking skills may be promoted are through problem solving and questioning technique.

Problem solving is a process where an individual identifies a problem situation, formulates explanations or hypotheses, verifies these hypotheses by gathering and evaluating data, and restates the hypotheses or arrives at generalizations. These generalizations may then be applied to new situations.

Many use reflective thinking or inductive reasoning to identify the problem solving method. Inductive reasoning is the process of leading an individual toward solving a problem by providing sufficient stimulation and a direction. Inquiry is the method of searching for the solution to a problem. Discovery may occur as the person reassembles or reorganizes information based on learning and gains insight into the problem.

The problem solving approach depends greatly on the ability of children to think effectively. The task of instruction is to provide systematic training in thinking and to help students acquire cognitive skills which are necessary for thinking autonomously and productively. (Taba, 1967)

As Piaget explains, there is a sequential order in the development of thought from childhood to adulthood. Each step is a prerequisite to the next. A student should manipulate concrete objects in order to grasp the abstract concepts before engaging in abstract reasoning. Teaching strategies require the proper developmental sequence.

Problem solving should fit right into the social studies curriculum. I cannot think of a better way to introduce problem solving than with problems that actually occur in our society. If we as teachers select problems that relate to the community, state, world, etc., then these problems can be directly related to the students and all will get a better handle on situations important to them. One drawback may be that problem situations will have to be collected within differing communities. One good resource for this would be the children.

Another important aspect in the development of thinking skills is questioning technique. Problem solving requires the ability to ask appropriate questions and students cannot develop this skill unless they encounter such questions in their studies.

The usual assumption is that the development of thinking skills flows naturally as a result of the acquisition of knowledge. The belief is widespread that if one is well-informed, the solution of problems

will pretty much take care of itself. Consequently, the process of thinking consists of a series of subskills, and like any other skills, they must be practiced in order to be applied with any degree of proficiency. According to Jarolimek (1986) these skills are as follows:

1. Identifying problems and questions for study
2. Making inferences and drawing conclusions from data
3. Making comparisons
4. Developing hypotheses
5. Using evidence to test hypotheses
6. Planning how to study a question or problem
7. Getting data from a variety of sources
8. Predicting possible outcomes
9. Deciding what evidence is needed in studying a problem
10. Deciding what evidence is relevant to the study

If teachers are to develop thinking skills, they must know how to ask the right questions at the time when the child appears ready for the question. Research indicates that teachers tend to ask lower level questions, concrete questions that require the individual to recall information.

A model of questioning that is beneficial in aiding the teacher's ability to ask questions at higher level thoughts is that of Taba. (1967) Taba's model is based on three cognitive levels: concept formation, interpretation of data collected and application of principles.

Concept formation is when the child is asked to list, group, and categorize through questions such as, What did you see, hear, note? What belongs together? On what criterion? What would you call these groups? What belongs under what?

Interpretation of data collected is when the child is asked to draw inferences and generalize through questions such as, What did you notice, see, find? Why did it happen? What does this mean? What picture does it create in your mind? What would you conclude?

Application of principles is when the child is asked to hypothesize about what will happen in a new situation through questions such as, What would happen if? Why do you think this would happen?

In order for children to receive maximum benefit from problem solving strategies and questioning techniques, there needs to be an atmosphere in which the children feel a sense of trust and security. Students must know they will receive help and understanding and that they can ask questions and offer acceptable answers without fear of being wrong. The classroom environment should create an atmosphere of mental freedom that enables each individual to think without concern for boundaries. (Skeel and Sterling, 1979)

Social studies provides a natural setting in which to teach, promote and practice social and group-work skills. The social studies program requires children to plan and work together. They are to strive toward common goals and to share materials, tools, and resources.

The term "group" must be understood as more than a collection of individuals. Individuals develop into a group through a feeling of cohesiveness, a feeling of belonging, identifying with it, and

growing of their concern for the welfare and success of the class. In a group, the actions of the individuals are influenced by other members and the behavior of individual members also affects the group.

Teacher behaviors will contribute or detract from setting a desirable atmosphere. Groups of children also vary considerably. Creating the most desirable atmosphere may be more difficult with some groups than it is for others.

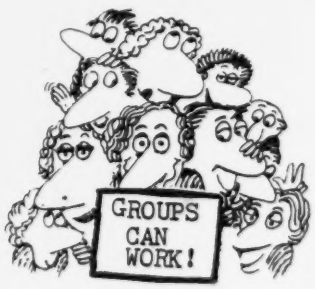
An emotionally supportive atmosphere is characterized by trust and evidence that individuals care about one another. Teachers who develop comfortable classroom environments are concerned with a broad range of educational outcomes. They deal with the emotional and social development of children in addition to subject matter and skills goals.

The most significant characteristic of a desirable classroom climate is the lack of hostility within the group. This level of hostility is related to what the teacher says and does. Practices that tend to decrease hostility in the classroom begin with positive statements by the teacher. Cooperative rather than competitive situations decrease hostility within the classroom.

A teacher must also recognize the individual differences of students and create a relaxed comfortable pace. Students should be involved in the planning and management of the class. This may create a warm and friendly relationship between the teacher and children. Most of all, the teacher needs to provide many opportunities for pleasurable emotional experience. Group-work skills develop

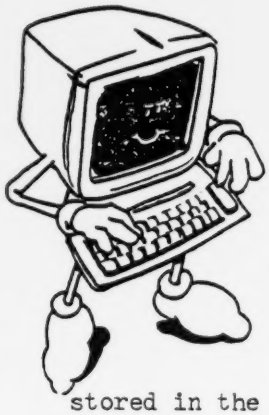
slowly and gradually and require practice in order to be learned.

Unfortunately group activities do not always run smoothly. In order to minimize problems there are some things teachers can implement to aid in success. The teacher should keep the size of the group small, keep in mind the status of members within the class, and reward group work appropriately. I have also found that class discussion of group work can be beneficial. At the end of each group-work session, discuss how the groups performed; What problems did they have? What worked well? What improvements could be made next time? This helps them realize that it takes practice in working well together.



The use of computers in education has grown so rapidly that it is estimated, by the end of this decade, microcomputers will be a part of the instructional media of all schools. In the social studies, as in other curricular areas, the challenge for teachers is to integrate the computer into the ongoing instructional program.

A major difference of the computer, as opposed to other instructional media, is that the student has the ability to interact with the computer. It does not simply present the material to be learned as in a film, filmstrip, or a recording. The computer requires the active involvement



of the learner. It requires the operator to do something in order to proceed. The computer also allows for individualized pacing and learning. Within the social studies curriculum, computer-assisted instruction falls into categories.

The computer may be used to obtain information stored in the computer. According to Diem (1981) there is a growing number of collections of data, known as data bases, relevant to social studies. These will include what is now found in libraries, government document centers, and other informational collections. Being able to assess information through the computer is an essential social studies skill in this "high tech" era.

The computer is useful in order to practice and apply social studies skills such as map-reading, graph reading, chart interpretation, thinking, and problem solving. Computer programs of this kind are referred to as drill and practice. Although this term may be thought of in a negative sense, it actually involves the learner actively in improving performance.

As stated previously, the challenge for teachers is to integrate the computer into the ongoing instructional program. This may not be as easy as one might think. Social studies programs at the lower-intermediate level are hard to come by. Most programs are geared toward the junior high level. There are certain skills that can be found on different programs that relate to social studies even though the software is not designated as social studies software. Therefore, the search is intense.

Once the appropriate programs are found, there is then the process of figuring out how they work. This may not be as easy for someone who is not accustomed to the stubbornness of some computers. Therefore, it can be a difficult task but remember the computer is a high motivator in any curricular area.

The main goals of my research have been to look at alternative methods in my approach to teaching social studies. Through my research, I have discovered many things. Children need to be able to relate social studies to their own experiences. This allows concepts to be more meaningful and have more substance. The reading abilities of children during the reading of the social studies text should not be taken for granted. I learned many approaches to teaching the skills required for reading an informational text. Problem solving, questioning technique, group work, and computer study can all play a major role within the social studies program. An effective program is not found in teaching the social studies but teaching the use of the social studies. From now on if you want to find my class and myself during social studies--------we'll be fishing!

Gone Fishing

CHAPTER THREE
DATA COLLECTION

INTRODUCTION

The following data was collected from a group of twenty-three children. All of the children were from an upper middle class area. All students in the class were caucasian.

The classroom setting was bright and warm. The children sat at tables and worked together often. Data was collected during the social studies class period which took place every morning just before lunch.

The first area of concern in regard to data collection was that of unit selection. I needed to decide which units in the social studies text were best suited for my needs. I chose three units in which I felt the text presented the material with a high degree of difficulty. The units I chose were a combination map skills/Chicago unit, a small group teaching project, and a unit on the parts of the metropolitan community. Time spent on each unit was approximately two to three weeks with the exception of the parts of the metropolitan community which lasted four weeks. The methods with which I collected my data were: observation, journal writing, surveys, and student questionnaires.

UNIT #1: MAP SKILLS/CHICAGO

The first chapter to be covered within the social studies curriculum is that of map skills. In the text, the material is presented at an extremely high degree of difficulty. This is especially true for incoming third graders who, in a lot of respects, still perform at the level of second grade children. Also covered in September is the unit on Chicago because that is when the third grade takes several field trips to the city. Since both units fell at the same time, I combined my data collection in order to cover both areas. For the sake of keeping things straight, I will deal with them separately.

Map Unit:

Geography is not an easy concept to teach to seven and eight year old children. Words like northern and southern hemisphere, continent, map scale, etc. are all basically new to the children. These concepts are certainly more difficult than family, community, etc. which are the concepts taught at the second grade level. Also, my goal was to teach social studies based on the past experiences of the children. So how was I going to teach about Antarctica and Africa? I do not think many of them took summer vacations to these places! And how was I supposed to teach them about far away continents, when many did not even know what city or state in which they lived? Therefore, my first task was to pick apart the chapter

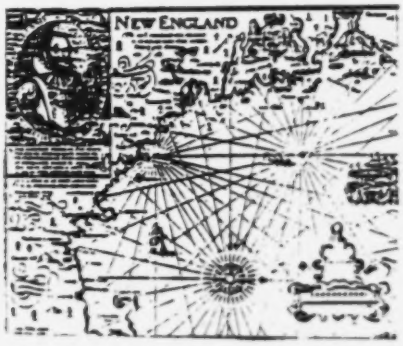
and decide which concepts were important for me to teach.

Selecting the concepts to teach was easy but figuring out how to present the material was a different story. So what did I do?---more research! I went through my files and pulled everything I had that related to map study. I also asked a few of my friends to do some cleaning of their files so I could expose myself to as much information as possible. Even the librarian was carting materials around from other schools in order to lend a hand.

When I finally had all the materials piled on the back table in my classroom, I started to read through them. I pulled worksheets and activities to supplement every concept that I wanted to be covered. I found a set of map skills filmstrips that explained some of the concepts far better than the text ever could. I found a computer program called Mickey's Space Adventures which dealt with directions (north, south, east, west) and was appropriate for independent skills reinforcement. It took me about three hours to learn the program but the children picked it up in no time. They really enjoyed it. They repeatedly asked if we could turn on the computer. As a result, the computer was often kept on all day long and not just during social studies.

I felt more at ease during the unit and I think the children picked up on this. I did not feel as bored and the activities in class were not only educational but fun as well. For example, instead of looking at maps and map symbols in a book, we wrote our own. We also gave our maps to a friend to see if they could follow and understand what the maps were trying to say.

I wanted to end the unit with an activity that the children would remember and what better way than to have a treasure hunt? It took me several hours to write it but the children had a ball! The class was divided into four teams and each team was given a treasure map with directions. (See appendix) They needed to use all skills learned in order to follow these directions which lead them to a treasure. I felt the activity was a huge success! All of the children found their treasures thus letting me know that the major concepts had been learned.



I was extremely pleased with the results of the map unit. I distributed a questionnaire and received thirteen responses. The results are as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
Did you like the unit?	Yes No	Yes 11 No 2
Why?	We made our own maps	(2)
	Treasure hunt	(4)
	We did a lot of activities	(1)
	It was neat	(1)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
	Because I like maps	(1)
	It was fun	(1)
	It was interesting	(1)
Why not?	Sort of boring	(1)
	Did not participate	(1)
Did you like Mickey's Space Adventures?	Yes No	Yes 13 No 0
What did you learn from Mickey's Space Adventures?	Space, planets, maps, and a lot of other things	(1)
	That you go certain ways	(1)
	Space	(3)
	North, South, East, West	(4)
	Maps	(4)
Did you like the treasure hunt?	Yes No	Yes 13 No 0
Why? What did you learn?	You can go a long way and find a treasure	(1)
	I can write treasure maps of my own	(1)
	It was adventurous	(1)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
	I learned north, south, east, west	(2)
	Following rules	(1)
	Reading a map	(7)
Did you like when you made your own maps? Explain.	Yes-I hid something	(1)
	Yes-You could know where you would be going and it was neat	(1)
	Yes-It was fun because you got to make your own map	(1)
	Yes-It was fun	(4)
	Yes-I liked it	(2)
	Yes-It was fun giving them to a friend	(2)
	Yes-It felt like when we were in the real, real, olden days when the Indians used to live	(1)
	Not really-It was hard work	(1)

Chicago:

The core of the third grade social studies curriculum is Chicago. We begin discussing Chicago in September and continue to relate concepts to Chicago throughout the year. Our entire focus is on the metropolitan community, and so as to benefit the children as best as possible, we focus on the Chicago Metropolitan Community. In May/June we wind up our studies with a week of field trips to the city.

Early discussion of Chicago is to prepare the children for the first field trip into the city. The trip consists of a walking tour in which we discuss architecture, early explorers, sights, and monuments.

The grade level is equipped with a textbook on Chicago. This supplementary text is written at a high degree of difficulty. Therefore, I read all of the important information out of the book to the students. I also added narrative to the material presented in the text. The teacher next to my classroom asked from what I was reading because she said it sounded so different from the text. I was pleased to say that I was teaching about Chicago my own way and was using the text as a supplement to the lesson.

The children were very much involved in discussion. They wanted to contribute so much that I had to keep saying, "Okay hands down. We need to go on." As much as I hated to do it, our time was limited. I had never had a class more involved in discussion and I was pleased!

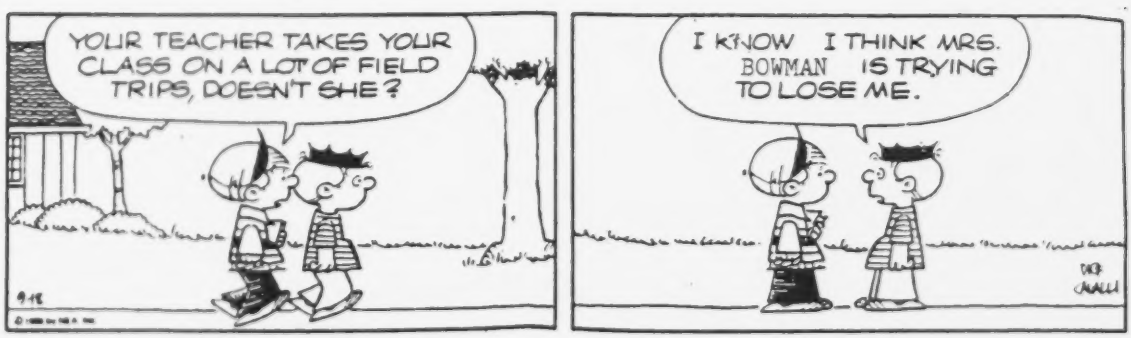
I think the Chicago Studies Unit went well this year. I realized my reason for success. Upon discussion with a teacher who started at Tripp School at the same time as myself, we both discovered our class

discussions to be more successful this year. We decided the solution was that we knew more about Chicago and thus could teach the material more effectively. We did not have to rely on the dry, social studies text but could enhance the lesson through our prior experiences.

After the children completed the following survey, I realized my questions should have been more specific. In this way, I could have learned more about their feelings. Next year I will revise the following questions. Nineteen surveys were completed and the results are as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
Did you enjoy learning about Chicago?	Yes No	Yes 17 No 2
What did you like?	Chicago Fire History	(1)
	Illinois State Building	(8)
	Picasso	(2)
	John Hancock	(1)
	The fun	(1)
	Everything	(2)
	The Fort Monument	(1)
	Fire Station	(1)
What didn't you like?	The work	(1)
	I've seen it before	(1)
	Nothing	(8)
	The smell	(1)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
	The pigeons	(1)
	Walking	(3)
	Drawbridges	(1)
	That we could not go to the Sears Tower	(1)
	The bus ride and the traffic	(2)
Would you like to go back to Chicago?	Yes No	Yes 19 No 0
Why?	It's fun	(11)
	The balloons	(1)
	It was fun to see the tall buildings	(1)
	We were in the newspaper	(2)
	It was neat	(2)
	We had no school	(1)
	I cannot answer that	(1)



UNIT #2: SMALL GROUP TEACHING PROJECT

Unit two was my first attempt at student-centered learning with this group of children. With this method of teaching being so new to me, I made some mistakes during this small group project. I liked the concept of the project and I learned a great deal from the mistakes as well as the successes.

I chose chapter two for this project because of it being short and the concepts not being as difficult as chapter one. I began the project by telling the students that they would be teaching the class about a concept or section of the chapter. The first thing we did was list, on the board, all the concepts that needed to be taught. For example

rotation	places warm all year long
axis	places cold all year long
revolution	solar energy
seasons	equator

We did this as a class by going through the chapter and listing all headings and boldfaced words. The children could then select which concept they wanted to teach. After the groups were formed, I told the children to get together with the other members of their group and read the section on the concept they had chosen.

The next class session was spent introducing the lesson plan. The plan consisted of the following information.

Names_____ _____

Lesson Plan _____ _____

Concept to be taught _____

_____page_____

How are you going to teach the concept? _____

_____

_____

How are you going to evaluate or make sure everyone understood the lesson?_____

_____

Most of the groups had little trouble with the first two questions and, of course, for evaluation they all wanted to give a test. Writing the information on the lesson plan was a piece of cake but presenting the lesson was a different story.

Most groups chose to present a mural or drawing and one group made a small project out of clay. It was obvious to me which groups were going to succeed and which groups were doomed from the start. We had gone over rules for group work but some of the students just could not function appropriately.

For example, one small group of four children could not decide how they wanted their picture to look. They kept starting over and one time when I walked by, I noticed a member of the group had isolated himself and was coloring a picture of his own. I had to intervene several times in order to help them get back on track. They were finally able to produce something as a group but when they made their oral presentation they had the same problems. Another group of three children could not work well together. One boy just had to have his way on everything and he caused the destruction of the group. Finally, I had to make strong suggestions of what their responsibilities were to be.

The other three groups were a success. I noticed a leader emerged from each group and all participated toward the goals of the project. These three groups that produced projects had less difficulties when it came to the presentations.

The questionnaires I received from the children did not seem to be as negative as the experience I remember. One group did an outstanding job of explaining rotation. They actually showed the planets revolving and questioned the class afterwards for evaluation. Two other groups just explained the charts they had drawn. One group read from the textbook and another group went to the front of the class and passed out a test without ever teaching the concept. The last group could not even present because they had no final project. I gave all three members of this

group the option to produce an individual project and one student turned in nothing.

Since I needed a basis for a grade, I told the groups I would require them to have the following.

1. A Lesson Plan
2. A Final Project
3. A Presentation

The better they produced---the better the grade.

I know my major mistake was that I handed over too much responsibility too soon. They needed a lot more structured group work before they could handle a project like this. Next time I will do it later in the year.

The children did not seem to think it went as poorly as I. The nineteen questionnaire results are as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
Did you like making a group project?	Yes No	Yes 16 No 3
Did you understand the lesson plan and what you needed to teach?	Yes No Sort of	Yes 10 No 5 Sort of 4
What worked well for your group?	Nothing	(2)
	Making the project	(11)
	Everything	(2)
	Working together	(4)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
What would you do different next time?	Read out of book	(1)
	Teach more	(3)
	Say something else	(1)
	Don't know	(2)
	Do something else	(2)
	Not goof around	(1)
	Not do anything	(2)
	Learn about holidays	(1)
	Make a good report	(1)
	Give good grades	(1)
	Teach them instead of giving them a test first	(1)
	Work harder	(1)
	Do nothing different	(2)
Do you think your grade was fair?	Yes No Don't Know Kind of	Yes 14 No 2 Don't know 1 Kind of 2
Would you like to work on projects again?	Yes No Doesn't Matter Maybe	Yes 16 No 1 Doesn't Matter 1 Maybe 1

UNIT #3: THE PARTS OF A METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY

Throughout the course of the year, I have spent much time and effort teaching the children how to use their social studies books. I taught them how to read the pictures, maps, and charts along with important study skills like reading titles, boldfaced words, and key words. We spent a lot of time discussing the progress of a city and the metropolitan community. By the time we got to chapter eight, "The Parts of the Metropolitan Community," we were ready for a change of pace.

We spent one class period reading chapter eight. I wanted to discuss the various parts of a metropolitan community before we began our project. I told the children that we were going to be making a model of the metropolitan community and to think about which area they wanted to work on. The next day we formed our groups and began the most successful project of the year!

We started with a piece of cardboard approximately ten feet long by five feet wide and several empty milk cartons, juice boxes, and various containers. Each child was responsible for making the building of his/her choice which was to be placed on the map of our make-believe city. The buildings had to be appropriate to the chosen area of the community. For example:

> Central Business District (downtown area)-Would contain buildings such as restaurants, apartments, banks, offices, etc.

Industrial Area-Would contain buildings such as factories.

Residential Area-Would contain places of residence.

Slum Area-Would contain buildings that were run down.

Suburbs-Would contain mostly houses, stores, etc.

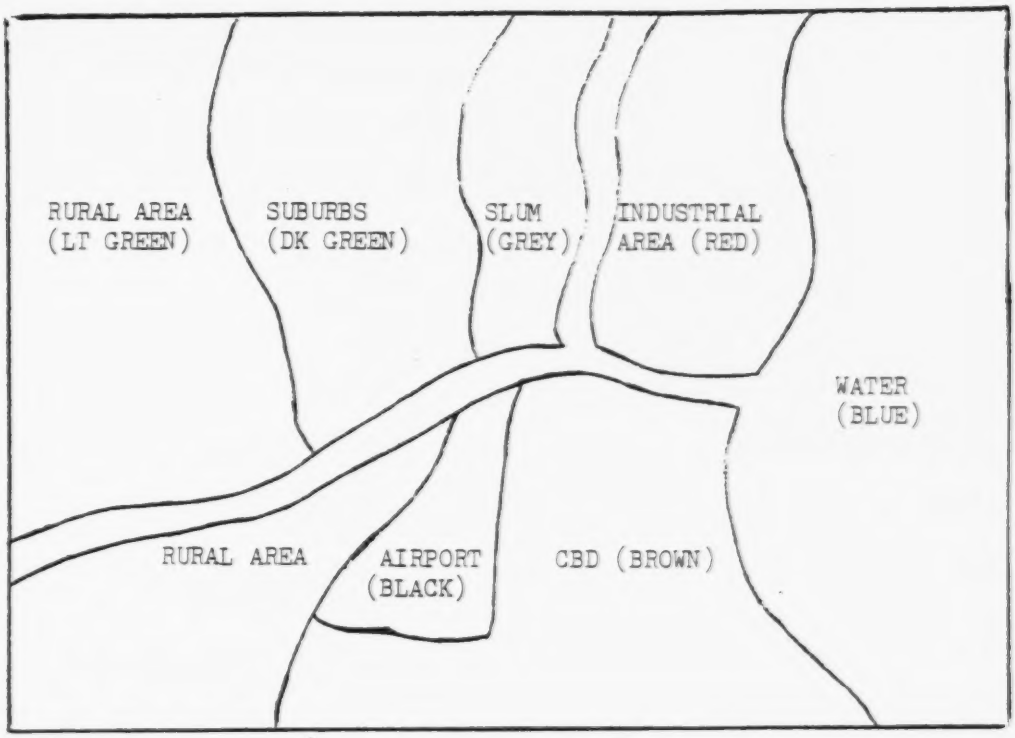
Rural Area-Would have more open land and contain farmhouses, small stores, etc.

The children decided what area to work on and the building they wanted to construct. Then construction began!

If you can picture a construction site with debris lying all over the ground, having to be careful of every step so as not to bump into something or someone, and the smell of fresh plaster and paint, you can picture what our classroom looked like for two weeks.

We began with paper maché. Since tempera paint will not cover plastic coated cartons, we first had to cover our buildings with a material that was similar to casts. It was like thick, tweed paper that is wet and applied over the cartons. This process took two to three days depending on the size of the building. For example, a skyscraper or large factory took much longer than a small house or restaurant.

After the buildings dried for a day, we began to paint. Each child decided how their building should look and what colors to use. It took about four to five days to complete all the painting. Most children constructed more than one building so they had a lot to paint. They also painted the base for our project after a small group of boys designed the boundaries. The base looked something like this:



After all of the buildings were completed, we began the construction of our city. The children had to decide what belonged where and how they wanted their map to look. They had also brought in street signs, small trees, animals, railroad track and train, airplanes, bridges, and rocks to be put on the map.

They all took turns gluing on the various pieces of the map. I am happy that they worked extremely well together. One day I walked up to supervise and they were taking turns, listening to each other, and getting work done so I left them alone. They knew how they wanted <u>their</u> project to be and they did not need me interfering. That is what I liked best about this project. It was theirs---very student-centered and I felt good about it!

The last step of the project was to give our city a name and write a brief description of it so we could display it in the front lobby. The children decided to call it "Bowman's Super City" and we made a big sign to hang over the project. We displayed our city in the main hallway of our school for all to see. We received a lot of positive comments on it and the children were so proud. Now isn't that what learning is all about?

After the completion of "Bowman's Super City," I distributed a survey in order to get feedback on the project. Out of the twenty-one surveys completed, the results are as follows:

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
Did you like the project?	Yes No	Yes 21 No 0
What did you like about the project?	Paper maché, painting, gluing	(10)
	Groups	(4)
	Everything	(1)
	It was all about my favorite subject	(1)
	I liked doing a project with the class	(1)
	We got a lot done	(1)
	Making the map	(3)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	# OF RESPONSES
What didn't you like about the project?	Clean up	(1)
	Having to leave for speech	(1)
	Nothing I didn't like	(19)
What did you learn from this project?	Painting is fun	(2)
	About maps	(2)
	About the areas of the city	(17)

CONCLUSION

To be perfectly honest, when I think back to the time when I was choosing a topic, I really was not sure if I wanted to write about social studies methods. I never particularly cared for social studies as a student and I was bored with teaching it. The main reason I decided to go with social studies was because it was the area in which I needed the most help. Now I am glad I chose it because I consider my project a huge success. I do not mean only in regards to what my students have learned but rather what I have learned.

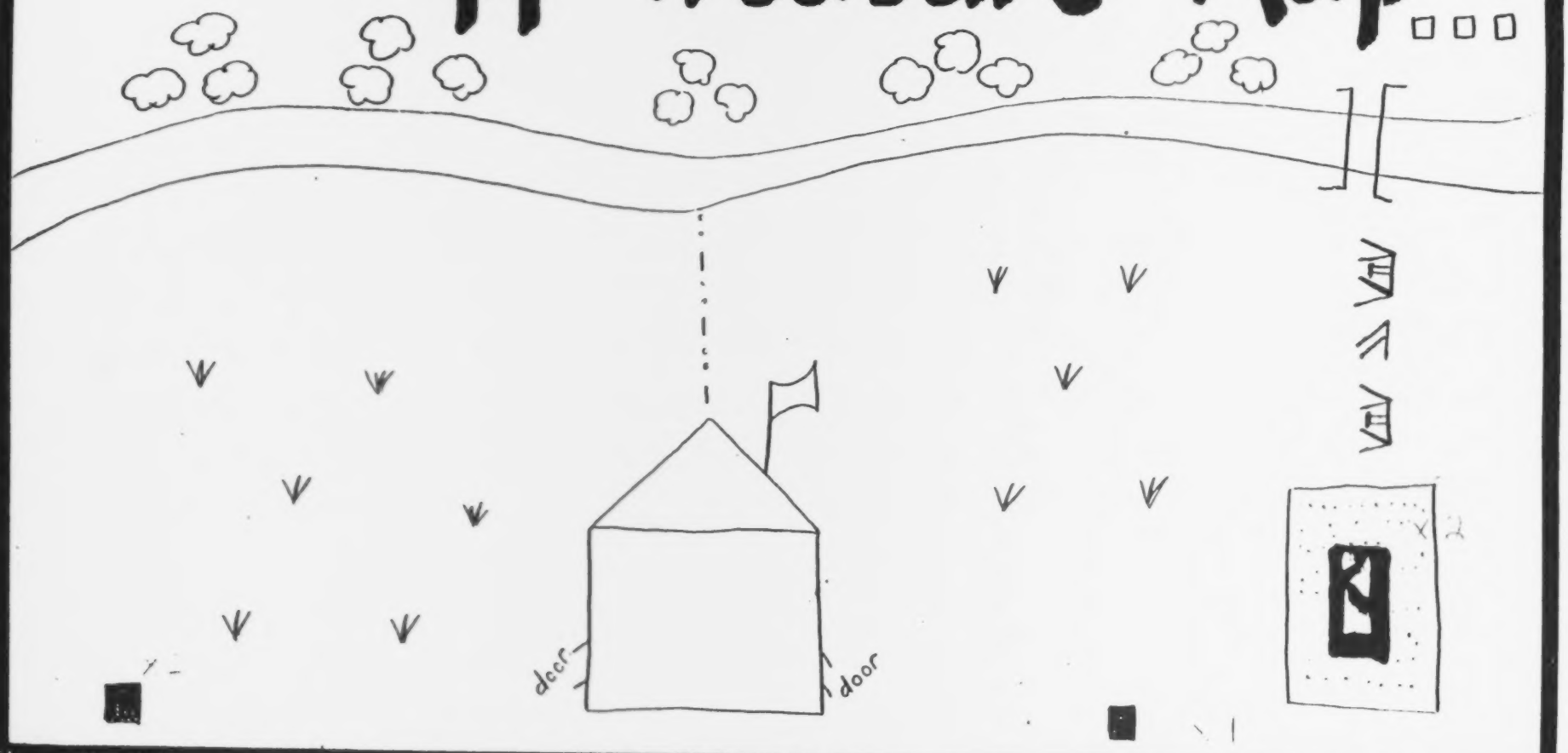
The textbook does not need to be the sole basis for instruction. There are many other methods that can be used in order to insure learning. Group and cooperative work can be successful. Social studies provides a natural setting in which to promote these skills. Problem solving is beneficial, especially when the problems directly relate to the experiences

of the children. Computers can also be integrated into the curriculum. Programs appropriate to the lessons taught can be a motivating, fun way to learn and practice skills. Also, textbooks can be utilized in a more positive fashion if the children are taught how to use it.

This year I actually enjoyed teaching social studies. I spent a lot of tedious hours devising lessons but I feel I have a good, solid program that can be utilized over the years. I feel good about my students' perceptions of social studies and I believe it was a more positive learning experience for them than it has been for others in the past. I am glad we took our heads out of that textbook and managed to learn the concepts through alternative methods. I am satisfied. The project was a lot of long, hard work but well worth it!

APPENDIX

Tripp Treasure Map



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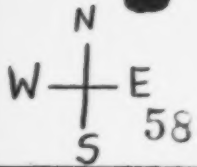

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- forest/trees
- river/creek
- field area
- school
- sand
- big toy
- swings
- slide
- bridge
- buildings
- parking lot

Rules

The rules must be followed in order for you to get the treasure!

1. You must walk and work AS A GROUP!
2. You must listen to the team captain. They will read the directions and then, AS A TEAM, you may go.
* 3. Use your maps to help the team.
4. You must not assume that any treasure is yours. Your treasure will be marked with your team number. If you come across a treasure with another number, IT IS NOT YOURS!
5. You must walk the treasure to your teacher as soon as you find it. Team Captains are in charge of the treasure and NO ONE ELSE!

Captains Responsibilities

You read the directions to your team, ONE AT A TIME. You make sure your team records each step. You are in charge of the treasure. Then, all may share it after it is brought to the teacher.

60 HAVE FUN!

Group Number 1

1. Your journey begins at the door on the east side of the . Go there.

2. Walk east to . Record the number of steps it took you to get there. _____ steps.

3. Look at . Go to the northwest side of the .

4. Walk north to the . Record the number of steps it took you to get there. ____ steps.

5. Walk west through the until you get to the . You should be about at the middle of the . Record the number of the steps it took you to get there. _____ steps.

6. Keep walking west to the end of the . Record the number of steps it took you to get there. _____ steps.

7. Walk south until you get to the . STOP. Do not walk on the . Record the number of steps it took you to get there. _____ steps.

8. Look for your treasure AS A GROUP.

9. Report to your teacher.

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